DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 425 CS 503 562

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TITLE Instructional Approaches to Qualitative Research Methods.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (31st, Minneapolis, MN, May 21-25, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Organization; Curriculum Design; *Field Studies; Higher Education; *Research Design; *Research Methodology; *Speech Communication; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Qualitative Research

ABSTRACT

Qualitative research procedures may be characterized by the practice of empiricism that is sensitive to individual perspectives of reality. The many techniques that may be used are malleable and situation-specific in their design--contingent on those aspects of social phenomena that are chosen to be studied. Practical curriculum design for teaching qualitative methods can be viewed within two major thrusts of pedagogical goals: to channel the efforts of student field study into the practice of procedures related to the instructor's own empirical endeavors, and to maximize student interests in the phenomenal world. The major content characteristics of the qualitative methods course are typically lecturing, training within the experience of the phenomenal world, and evaluation of the student's performance based on observation notes, formal writing, and participation in class discussions drawn from field experiences. The format can vary but is likely to include five major areas: (1) the prefieldwork literature survey of phenomenological philosophy, field ethnographies, and general overview of qualitative research techniques; (2) field entry and consideration for matching technique to social phenomena; (3) field disengagement and the ethics of debriefing and information disclosure; (4) data analysis; and (5) the elemental write-up and presentation of results. (HOD)

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INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES TO QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

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International Communication Association, Minneapolis, May 1981.
Panel Series: "Problems and issues in Ethnological Studies of Mass Communication."

Instructional Approaches to Qualitative Research Methods

Five years ago one would have searched in vain for a panel focusing on issues for the ethnological study of mass communication phenomena. The articulation of our philosophies continues to grow, marked by the emergence in communication literatures of a new empirical phenomenology of mass communication characterized by the employment of phenomenological perspective and qualitative methods (Lull, 1980; Reid & Frazer, 1980). As the qualitative study of mass media and social behavior continues, so too must we begin to formalize the concurrent passing on of our experiences to students through the teaching of philosophy and the practice of technique.

The abstract for this paper provided some time ago to panelists, respondent, and audience members alluded to the "problems and issues" of various approaches in the instruction of qualitative research methods. The review of literatures indicate the shortage of articles (Hraba, Powers, Woodman, & Miller, 1980), or convention papers (Goodlet & Lynch, 1979) addressing pedagogical issues of phenomenology and qualitative methodologies. In short, we attend these meetings to express our views and findings within the realm of non-traditional research methods and too often fail to include the qualitative work we all perform directly or indirectly in the courses we teach. The other panelists here are relating to you their contributions to an ever-growing body of literature that translates phenomenological philosophy to a study of mass communication and social behavior. Let us interrupt that essential process for a few minutes and ponder the pedagogy of teaching qualitative methods within schools or departments of communication study.

If one thing may characterize qualitative procedures, on paper at least, it is the practice of empiricism sensitive to individual perspectives of reality. The host of techniques we may use are very malleable and situation

specific in their design--contingent on those aspects of social phenomena, including mediated, that we choose to study. The social phenomena we do study are recognized, within phenomenological framing, for their processual characteristics--seen by some as an empirical world without prediction. This places constraints on the degree of structure when we set out to investigate something new. Qualitative methods help the ethnographer to <u>see</u> within a a "loosely-coupled world" (Weick, 1980, p. 2), where there is no logic to phenomenal events, but temporal relationships between events and phenomena. Process orientations (Smith, 1972), in keeping with the unpredictable nature of social behavior, provide the perspective for endorsing, and teaching qualitative procedure.

Speaking pedagogically, I would encourage my colleagues to hang loose within the interests of their students while committed to the illumination of philosophy, the hands-on experiences of technique, within an evaluatory framework of the student's own processual development through the term of study. Teaching qualitative methods must reflect the method--and must be true to its fundamental tenets of individual perspective-taking and the elaboration of subjective/personal experiences.

The natural setting receiving the greatest focus on today's panel is with the televiewing family. This concentration provides the support of colleagues predisposed and supportive toward the cause of qualitative study of social actors and their relationships with the mass media in natural settings. Let us, however, as advocates of qualitative procedure, not be remiss in illuminating for our acquaintances the appropriateness of qualitative study given the subject matter for many of their own topical interests. Qualitative methods in mass communication study are not limited to the examination of mediated social phenomena, but may also be applied as useful perspective and method to other communities of mass communication inquiry. The study of mass

media institutions seem particularly well suited to qualitative investigation, and would reveal insightful, intuitively valid, and hard-line data. Specific topics for study jog the mind, but include the examination of network programming, the creative industry of television production, news gathering organizations, station management and operations, and, indeed, the institutionalized organizations of major audience research.

Major Pedagogical Thrusts[1]

Practical curriculum design for teaching qualitative methods can be viewed within two major thrusts or pedagogical goals. These influence the pragmatics of class content and procedure. The first is where the instructor channels the efforts of student field study into the practice of procedures related to the instructor's own empirical endeavors. This technique has the advantage of training students in the preconceived and, hopefully, pretested procedures for the examination of specific social phenomena. Within this format, the management of content and literatures are identified and complete. The student learns a set of procedural rules for qualitative research, given selected social phenomena, and passes the course by meeting the pre-established requirements that contribute to the instructor's own growing data base. Somehow, this method of teaching seems to stifle the creativity inherent within qualitative procedures.

In contrast would be the development of a curriculum of qualitative training maximizing student interests in the phenomenal world. This thrust has attractive utility for the instructor intent on developing and assessing the student's individual strengths and weaknesses as a qualitative researcher.

The major content characteristics of the qualitative methods course, within either format, may be typified by a structure composed on ongoing lecturing, training within the experience of the phenomenal world, and ongoing evaluation of the student's performance based on observation notes, formal writing, and

participation in class discussions and debriefings drawn from field experiences.

The format within this structure can vary, given the predispositions of the instructor, but would probably include five major content areas; (1) the pre-fieldwork literature survey of phenomenological philosophy, field ethnographies, and general overview of qualitative research techniques, (2) field entry and considerations for matching technique to social phenomena, (3) field disengagement and the ethics of debriefing and information disclosure, (4) data analysis, and (5) the elemental write-up and presentation of results.

As the presentations by other panelists can testify, considerations within any one of these procedures within the ethnographic classroom are far reaching--and in themselves occupy subject matter substantive in itself to fill a semester of graduate study. The time frame of this public presentation allows only cursory treatment of each component.

Pre-Fieldwork. The teaching of any methodology requires the initial direction of the instructor into the literature of philosophical groundings and procedural interpretations. At the forefront of initial preparation of students is a grounding in the rationale and logic for doing qualitative research. These literatures are abundant and in their place (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; McCall & Simmons, 1969; Filstead, 1970; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Lofland, 1971; 1975). These literatures paint both an interpretive model of individual's in social interaction and comcomitant methods of empiricism.

The models are most often interpreted within Weber's influential perspective of phenomenological sociology (Weber, 1949; 1968; Truzzi, 1974)--the "creative sociologies of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; 1964: Blumer, 1962; 1969; 1972; 1973) and ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1964; 1967; Turner, 1974; Mehan & Wood, 1975; 1976; Zimmerman, 1978). Both sociologies share

commonalities, but more characteristically represent departures when the discussion turns to methodology and the nature and substance of phenomenological data.

Here the instructor's predispositions and personal field experiences are useful as guidelines, but students should be encouraged to adopt the most useful perspectives within the phenomenological literature to match personal concerns and interests. The nature of qualitative data is determined by the interpretations of the phenomenological social actor within each ethnographer. Data are gathered in different forms and are used to achieve different analyses.

Concurrent with the development of phenomenoloigcal perspective within the classroom is the application of a working knowledge of qualitative techniques and user skills. Styles, types, and organization of notetaking are presented in lectures, readings, and examples. Student's innate skills would be measured at the onset of the term. This can be done in a number of ways. One is to treat the class as a communal body of non-participant observers who are assigned to cover an event simultaneously. Notes are compared and discussed in the consequent debriefing to show both the problems and advantages of multiple interpetations of the same event and the demonstrated need for meticulousness, ongoing maintenance, elaboration, and the discipline necessary when amassing data built around field-note procedures.

The range of qualitative techniques should be examined, contingent on general guidelines for their applicability within a number of considerations. These are many, but include researcher positioning and obtrusiveness, demands on time (both the social actor's and ethnographer's), topic sensitivity, and scope and management of study. Qualitative techniques are too many to mention here, but include procedures within participant and non-participant observation,

listening, formal and more conversational forms of interviewing, and the inspection of records, documents, proximal environs, and other cultural artifacts. The presentation of these techniques should be accompanied by an assessment of each method's informational yield, length of time required for proper field deployment and utilization, and relative risk when venturing out into the world of social interaction equipped only with non-traditional data gathering methods.

Entering the Field. The majority of class time would be spent within the repetitive pattern of qualitative procedures; fieldwork, writing, debriefing, discussions over data and findings, and the instructor's weekly evaluation of student notes. As students' interests take them out into the phenomenal world, they must be guided in the development of systematic focus of behaviors. They must review relevant literatures and create statements centering their investigation, translating their investigations into specific research goals and objectives. In essence, a contract is established between the instructor and student for an ethnography. The detailed requirements of this ethnographic paper would be established as the term progresses.

The entry of students into the particular social milieu is phasic, wherein the student's growing familiarity with interactional scenes is assisted by class discussions and personal readings. Within the field, the focus starts with preliminary investigation, sounding out initial leads, and gaining background information. Notes, generated by the student during this initial phase of fieldwork are primarily descriptive. They become more and more analytic as field study progresses, concurrent with the instructor's personal direction as second reader of all observation notes. This passing back-and-forth of observation notes serves two functions. First, it gives the instructor an inkling of the student's developing eye as social observer, and provides an initial baseline as to the student's degree of comfort within

natural settings research, personal perspectives, writing style, and degree of innate ability as a qualitative researcher. Second, weekly examination of each student's notes provides second readership to the student's growing composite of field notes. Here the instructor can suggest additional avenues of inquiry, procedural finetuning, and preliminary ideas toward the generation of analytic or pre-theoretical statements.

Guidelines for the subject matter and length of weekly notetaking will, no doubt, vary given the social phenomenon and person densities each student chooses to study. As a rough guideline, students should be encouraged to spend two hours elaborating, arranging, and analyzing their short-hand notes for each hour of field study.

The progress of each student is monitored weekly by the instructor's reading of observation notes and by the student's contributions to class discussions and debriefings. The bulk of student non-class homework is characterized by active field study and writing. Class discussions, during the fieldwork phase, would necessarily center around the methodological "dilemmas" encountered within each student's field experiences. These discussions could cover any number of considerations, but should be sure to include the focus on pedagogical strategies bent on improving each student's success within research encounters. These could include; (1) talking about strategies for establishing and maintaining fruitful relationships with individuals in the field, (2) the success of various qualitative procedures in their systematic arrangement and deployment in the field, (3) the maintenance of ethical considerations within the schedule of contacts that require highly personalized and one-on-one encounters with social actors, and (4) the development of analytic criteria and problems within data analysis.

The data-collection phase of the class represents the gradual decrease of pure descriptive notes on the part of student's writing and the increasing emergence of analysis within a growing body of notes. Some phenomena under study will reveal their nature quite readily, others will be stubborn and yield their structure at a higher price. As the term progresses, class discussions would necessarily turn to the qualitative procedures for ending data collection and visitations to the natural setting. These discussions would focus on disengagement procedures, data analysis, and the evolution of a structure for the presentation of results.

Disengagement. This is a consideration of the qualitative procedure here-to-fore contined inherently within all ethnographic work, but only now receiving attention in the qualitative literature (Snow, 1981). The management of disengagement and withdrawl from the social milieu must be exercised with care and caution--to ease personal separations from new-found acquaintances who started out as interested volunteers assisting the ethnographer in fieldwork. On a larger scale, disengagement considerations are taught to insure the successful public relations essential to qualitative procedures that necessitate and emphasize longtitudinality, and in some cases, a return to the same social setting after periods of elapsed time.

Disengagement begins with the winding down of data collection. Here is the assessment of such factors as the informational adequacy of existing data and the debriefing of ethnographees. When used effectively, debriefing provides confirmation from yet another window on the behavioral scene, the elaboration of personal perspectives, and the enrichment of life histories. When used ineffectively, the debriefing can alienate subjects and damage the ethnographer's credibility and potential for returning to the scene at a later date.

Data Analysis. Concurrent to the disengagement process, and inversely related to data characterized by pure description, is the implementation of data analysis with students. This includes; (1) an understanding of the process of analytic induction, (2) the physical processing of data (Lofland, 1971, pp. 118-130; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975, pp. 82-83), and (3) the generation of relationships, grounded analytic statements, and hypotheses (Becker & Geer, 1960; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Barton & Lazarsfeld, 1969; Bogdan & Taylor, 1975; Browning, 1975).

The Presentation of Results. The other panelists, discuss either directly or inherently the form and structure for the presentation of ethnographic studies. Students, then also must be made to develop a style and audience appropriate for the presentation of their field efforts. Students would be required to fulfill yet another requirement for the successful completion of the term. This would be the examination of a published ethnography, either in book, monograph, or article form. The review would touch on components emphasized throughout the course in class lectures, discussions, and debriefings, and would include the review of theoretical foundations, procedures, modes of analysis, and ethnographic style.

Where possible, the review should dovetail with the subject matter of the student's fieldwork. A final ethnographic paper, required of each student, would represent the cumulative efforts of the term of study, and would follow the form befitting popular ethnographic journals, or where topics allow, predominant journals within the field of communication.

Student Evaluation. As the empirical phenomenologist's investigation is evolutionary in nature, so too becomes the evaluation of students training in qualitative procedure. The emphasis in evaluation is on the student's mastery of philsophical underpinnings and new-found technical skills as a researcher of natural settings. As a form of measurement of this progress, and

in deference to the student's traditional perspective on evaluation, some form of enumerative attachment can be given to the student's observation notes, the critical reviews of an ethnography in the literature, the form and substance of the final paper-ethnography, and an assessment of the student's performance within the classroom setting heavily dependent on verbal contribtions by the active discussant.

Summary

I have attempted, in shortened form, to review pedagogical guidelines for instructional approaches to qualitative research methods. These included the examination of an instructional process that allows students first-hand encounters with phenomenological foundations and the practice and use of qualitative techniques.

Qualitative research is characterized by creative methodologies and interesting findings, and by practitioners intent on creating longtitudinal studies of social interactions in natural settings. The curriculum I've suggested will best be tested within the essential clearinghouse provided by future students of non-traditional research methods in the study of communication processes.

The procedure for a pedagogy of qualitative research methods is only as good as its own success within practical deployment in the classroom. The suggestions provided in this paper only reflect the optimal components seen as essential by the present author. Hopefully, I can report back to interested parties in future meetings as to the success or modifications to this method.

Footnotes

[1] The pedagogical considerations provided in this paper are generated from discussions with two active practitioners and instructors of qualitative methodology. My thanks to Dr. Larry D. Browning, Department of Speech Communication, and Dr. David A. Snow, Department of Sociology. Both are members of the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin.

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